

South Africa 2021 – First Time Hunt in the Limpopo Province

After a week of being tourists in Kruger NP and the Cape Town area, Bruce and I bade our wives goodbye and enjoyed another night at Afton Safari Lodge, located in a suburb of Johannesburg. The Afton Safari Lodge is the perfect place to transition from an overseas flight to a safari. We utilized their facilities both upon our initial arrival and prior to beginning our safari.

One of Cruiser Safari's Professional Hunters, Pieter Ferreira, arrived at Afton to drive us four hours north to our hunting area. The Cruiser Safari operation is located roughly halfway between the towns of Thabazimbi and Lephalale, in Limpopo Province, near the Botswana-South Africa border and is owned by Pieter Lamprecht.

Upon arrival we were greeted with welcoming drink and snacks, and then taken to the gun range. Once our rifle scopes were confirmed as good, Bruce headed one way with his PH while I headed in another direction with Pieter to get acquainted with some of the hunting areas.

The official start of our hunt was the morning following arrival. Bruce came with sable and nyala as his primary animals to harvest, while my priorities were sable, then kudu. We had been advised that even in this sable-rich area to expect several days to find the right bull.

Within an hour of leaving camp PH Pieter spotted a sable bull, possessing more horn curve, but less tip, than generally seen in sable his age and size. This sable had lots of company and after two unsuccessful stalks, Pieter decided to see what other bulls might be in the area.

Whenever Pieter would point out other species, I would reiterate that once we had a sable and a kudu, we could pursue other game. I respected and appreciated it when his keen eyes would find animals and he would point them out to me.

We were seeing many sables, but they needed a few more years to grow to trophy quality. We did see another suitable bull, but eventually opted to return for two more stalks on that first sable. He was a survivor for a reason. He would either remain just deep enough in the bush to thwart a shot, or he would position a younger companion bull between us.

After that fourth attempt, Pieter asked if I would be satisfied with the second good bull we'd seen. I replied, "Let's go back and take another look at him." Once we'd reacquired the second bull, I asked Pieter if he was a solid 40-inch animal. He confirmed it and we got down from the Land Cruiser to begin what turned out to be a fairly short stalk. The shot was on the mark, and before noon that first day I had my trophy sable.

For this trip I'd elected to take my Weatherby .30-.378 because we were hunting plains game and also because of the penetrating power of this cartridge on relatively thicker-hided and tougher African animals. Bruce was shooting a .300 Winchester Magnum.

With a sable in the shed, we turned our attention to kudu. In a previous outing, Pieter had seen a particular kudu bull that he thought appropriate for me. After several hours of looking at impala, blue wildebeest, zebra, warthog, red hartebeest, and sable, we encountered several small groups of kudu arising from their mid-day beds.

Eventually, Pieter laid eyes on the intended kudu bull. I lined up for a 150-meter shot through some grass and brush and squeezed off a round. The bullet found the animal as we heard the typical "whop," but the bull continued to stand there, and Pieter instructed me to get another round moving. It rarely happens, but

this time the cartridge did not feed correctly, annulling that second shot opportunity. After several seconds the bull was on the move.

Johannes, our tracker, confirmed the bull's print and identified blood. We tracked that bull until dark, at times losing the trail and needing time to sort out and find the diminishing blood drops and/or prints. Analyzing what could have happened on the shot, I suspect a slight branch deflection.

In the meantime, Bruce had filled out his license for a sable bull almost identical to mine and then early that afternoon anchored a nyala bull with beautiful ivory tips.

At supper that night, Bruce having earlier-than-planned filled his primary licenses, graciously offered the assistance of his driver, and PH, to help in the kudu tracking effort the next morning. Bruce and I have hunted together for 28 years, and he consistently exhibit selfless consideration in similar situations.

Day two of the hunt began with us picking up where we'd left off the night before, but it soon became apparent that any usable tracks had been over-traced by other animals. So, we began conducting human drives, spreading out about 50 meters apart and walking block-by-block in an effort to find my bull.

On African hunts, if you wound an animal but do not recover it, you are still financially responsible. I did not want to go home from this trip without a kudu. In the afternoon Bruce and his PH moved on to hunting eland, and we started searching a wider area for the kudu, to no success.

During supper both Pieters talked about hiring a helicopter to assist in locating my bull. While a bit farfetched to those of us who hunt primarily in North America, this method of wounded game location is utilized from time to time in Africa, since helicopters are actively used for other aspects of resource management.

Throughout the recovery effort for my kudu bull, I maintained confidence we would find him. We were doing everything we could to locate him. Even so, my emotions did run the gamut many hunters experience with a lost animal.

Pieter L. on the third day of our safari, began inquiring about the proximity and cost of a helicopter, while PH Pieter, Johannes and I headed back to the search. We had also hatched another plan – if we encountered a particular golden wildebeest bull seen several times during our prior searching, we would break-off the kudu search and pursue him. On a prior African safari, I had taken a record book blue wildebeest and wanted to add to a “Beest” Slam.

As it turned out, we did see that golden shortly after getting into the field. He was with a herd of blue wildebeest in thick cover, which complicated a stalk. After several attempts to stalk within range, he presented himself in an opening between two trees, with the sun glistening through his mane. After pictures it was back to the lodge.

The helicopter arrived around noon on the lodge helipad. The pilot was also named Pieter, so I nicknamed him “Flying Pieter”, to avoid confusion in communication, now that three Pieters were in the mix. Roughly 45 minutes after initiating a search, PH Pieter located and positively identified my kudu bull. The day ended far better than it had begun.

There are the two types of blesbok on Cruiser properties, the common blesbok, with its brown with white face markings, and the white blesbok.

My impression in observing blesbok is they generally prefer more open terrain. As we drove such areas, we were seeing few white specimens. At the risk of encountering a local Cape buffalo herd, I suggested

we take a cross-country stroll and get into several open areas beyond roads and trees and found a nice white blesbok.

While every day on this trip was unique, day five was special. Something that I may never experience again was the privilege to witness the darting of a world-class animal. It was a pure coincidence that we were there this particular day.

Pieter L. invited Bruce and me to go along for the darting and measuring of a magnificent sable bull. This bull's longest horn measured 58 1/8 inches and he is the largest known sable in the world. He is protected from being hunted and retained for breeding.

In the afternoon, PH Pieter, Pieter L.'s son, Christian, and I looked at many black impalas, and several times conducted stalks to get a closer look. I ended up taking a ram that missed by 1/8" making the Roland Ward record book.

At this point I thought my hunt was over, having achieved what I wanted and then some. The following day I stayed in camp, relaxing and reading. Bruce, meanwhile, after several days and multiple unsuccessful stalks scored on a beautiful Cape eland.

At supper that night I commented that I had interest in taking a gemsbok (known as an oryx to those of us in the USA.) We had seen few of them during the hunt. That prompted dialog about another area where there was an abundance of gemsbok.

So, on day seven of the safari, PH Pieter, Johannes and I headed to the Rose Valley area for gemsbok. The weather this day was non-typically blustery, and the winds turned even harsher as the morning progressed. Many animals sought the thickest cover. Even though we put in extra effort, for the first time on this safari, I thought I might be successful.

On our first gemsbok stalk we encountered a steenbok that Pieter wanted me to shoot. I declined, not wanting to disrupt the then in-progress stalk that proved unsuccessful, as did several more succeeding stalks.

After a wonderful lunch on a pan watching waterbuck, impala and wildebeest come into water, the winds subsided. Shortly thereafter, from the cab of the Land Cruiser, Johannes spotted a bull in a small herd. Pieter kept him in sight during a short pursuit and soon we had our gemsbok.

With this specimen loaded, I thought we would head back to the lodge, but Pieter had other things in mind. He wanted to go back and find that pigmy antelope. It was only after a short line of questioning that he got it through my head this was an exceptional steenbok. We located him, as they are very territorial and after several chase's he held still long enough for me to shoot him in the lower back half of his body, a means to minimize potential mount damage.

Why is he exceptional? His horns, gross and green, measured 5 and 5/8 inches. He will qualify for both the SCI and Roland Ward record books.

The irony of this trip is while I went to Africa for two large plains game animals, in the end one of the real prizes was this pigmy antelope.



Largest common sable in the world

(Continued)



Sable



Kudu



White Blesbok



Golden Wildebeest



Gemsbok



Black Impala



Steenbok